

## N.C. Plant and Animal Species Fact Sheets



### Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)

#### **Introduction**

The great blue heron is the largest heron in the middle Atlantic. It is a wading bird meaning that you often see them standing or wading in wetland areas looking for a meal.

#### **What do they look like?**

The "Great Blue" is a lean bird. It has great size and a blue-gray color. The beak is yellow and their legs are blue too.

#### **How big are they?**

They can stand 42"-52" (105-132cm)

#### **Where do they live?**

They inhabit the marshes, mudflats, and shallow pools of coastal or marshy areas. Sometimes they fish in drainage ditches near the coast.

#### **What do they eat?**

Fish is the mainstay of their diet. They also eat frogs, small reptiles and mammals, insects and other aquatic life.

#### **When do they mate?**

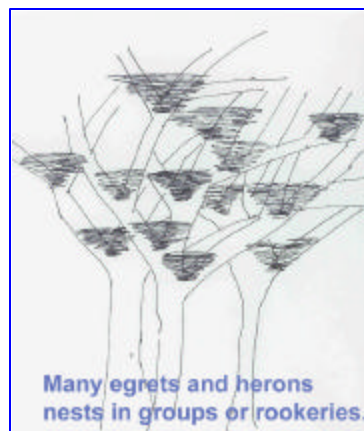
The breeding season varies, according to the location. Generally it is from the beginning of March to the middle of June. During breeding they have yellowish bills and plumes on the breast and back.

#### **What are the young like?**

Great Blue Herons lay 3-6 eggs during April or May in nests they build in trees nearby other herons.

#### **How long do they live?**

Their life span averages around 15 years, some have been known to live to the mid-twenties.



#### **People Interactions**

Some "Great Blues" tolerate boaters and allow homeowners and bird watchers to approach, but only so close. They seem

to have an invisible personal space that is off limits. This space allows them to hunt for prey.

### **EstuaryLive**

[www.EstuaryLive.org](http://www.EstuaryLive.org)

North Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserve

[www.ncnerr.org](http://www.ncnerr.org) or tel. 252.728.2170

Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program

<http://www.apnep.org/> or tel. 252.946.6481

Carolina Estuarine Reserve Foundation

[www.cerf.us](http://www.cerf.us)



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